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THE UPPER THAMES VALLEY

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THE
UPPER THAMES VALLEY

SOME ANTIQUARIAN NOTES

BY

LORD WYFOLD

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THE UPPER THAMES VALLEY

THESE Rough Notes call for an apology. They have no scientific importance; they may be of local interest. They are written not to give, but rather to get, information by the kindly criticism or indulgent reproof of those better qualified to instruct in such matters.

Indeed, they are only intended to serve as a basis for discussions similar to those which have appeared recently in the columns of the local Press and the pages of local archæological journals.

Science apart, the romance of antiquity is everywhere and endless: and in no part of the country does it make a wider, more varied or more vivid appeal than in the chalk ranges of the Southern Midlands. The district round Avebury and Stonehenge is naturally the

centre of archæological interest; but the Berkshire Downs, the Chiltern Hills, and the Valley of the Upper Thames have stories of their own to tell.

Throughout the district the flint implements of the people of the Stone Age are frequently found. What is believed to be one of their factories was recently discovered near the bed of a prehistoric river at Peppard in Oxfordshire.

Their ridgeway roads and hill forts seem to indicate an orderly system of government that was more than tribal, and there is evidence which suggests a civilization more advanced than that of some of those who came after them (Hippsley Cox, *The Green Roads of England*). Weapons of the Bronze Age have been discovered, Celtic and British enclosures, Roman coins, roads and ruins, Angle and Saxon earthworks, Danish battlefields, and the work of the Norman architects abound.

Churn Hill.—A fine view of the countryside can be got from Churn Hill, on the Berkshire Downs.

Above the village of Blewbury a solitary tumulus and single fir-tree mark what popular opinion in the locality holds, with superstitious reverence, to be the grave of St. Berinus.

The tradition that he preached here to his converts and followers need not be questioned; but he was buried, of course, in his church at Dorchester, and his remains were afterwards enshrined at Winchester. The story of the saint is fully told by the Rev. J. E. Field in his book, *St. Berin, the Apostle of Wessex.*

The barrow on Churn Hill was probably a monument to his memory, similar to the war memorials with which we are becoming so sadly familiar in our country to-day.

Mr. Field quotes a local antiquary (Hewett, *The Hundred of Compton*), who states that Blewbury and the hills above it appear to have been a cemetery for a very large district. "Barrows were only raised to the memory of exalted personages, and it seems probable that on the death of any king, or other illustrious individual, his corpse was

conveyed to these consecrated hills, and here buried near his ancestors."

One may compare the practice of the Egyptians, who moved the bodies of their monarchs from Carnac and Luxor to a common burial ground in the sacred hills across the Nile.

Failing burial, then, it was natural that his faithful followers should select one of the highest points in a spot like this for a monument to the saint, not only on account of its character, but because it is right opposite the place on the Chilterns—still called Berins Hill—where he first preached to, converted and baptized the heathen, and further, because it is conspicuous from all points of the compass over miles of country which were the scene of his activities and achievements.

Mr. Field connects the name Churn with the British "carn" or modern "cairn," and quotes Skeat as connecting it with the Welsh "carnu," "to pile up or heap together."

The supposed tomb has, like so many others, been excavated; but nothing was found in it, I believe. One wonders some-

times whether it is quite right that these places of rest should be disturbed. One shares to the full the curiosity which prompts the work, and envies the successes which have sometimes been attained, yet one is tempted to make—with many apologies—a couplet from two well-known lines:

> And fools rush in where angels fear to tread
> The grassy barrows of the happier dead.

Close by Churn Hill there is a steep—almost precipitous—declivity, a most unusual formation on these Downs, called "The Lid." The small wood below it is called Lid's Copse. Taylor mentions a River Lid, and the word occurs in Liddington, Lydiard, and the Lyddway in the Pewsey Valley. No satisfactory explanation of the meaning of the word has been given.

The White Horse.—From Churn Hill the Berkshire Downs undulate away to the west by Scutchamfly Nob towards distant White Horse Hill. The Chilterns run north-east,

while below them the Oxfordshire Vale, stretching northwards towards Aylesbury, presents all the appearance of being the bed of what was once a vast lake. One pictures it as the habitation of those semi-aquatic monsters, the Icthyosauri and the Dinosauri, and such-like creatures of the prehistoric world. There is justification for this suggestion. On page 296 of Gunter's book, *The Oxford Country*, there is a grim representation of some of them in an illustration called "The Geologist's Oxford Country," and on page 255 is a picture of the "Dinosaur of Enslow Bridge," or "Ceteosaurus Oxoniensis," whose remains were found by quarrymen on Lord Valentia's property in the time of the present peer's grandfather. The huge thigh bones can be seen in the Oxford Museum.

Further explorations were made some years ago by a Mr. Willett of Brighton, but nothing more was discovered. It is represented as sleek, fat, and apparently fertile; but anyone picturing the creature emaciated, dead, and decayed, will see that it bears a striking

resemblance to the so-called white horse carved in the chalk on White Horse Hill above Uffington. Anybody looking at the beak, the eye, the elongated body and tail of this curious figure must realize that it could never have been intended for a horse.

It is said to have been the work of Romans or of Saxons in commemoration of a victory; but the cave-dwellers of the Stone Age could have produced a better likeness of a horse than this weird creature. Indeed, they did so.

It is surely a representation of one of those prehistoric monsters commonly called dragons. Local tradition supports this opinion, for the hill just below it is called Dragon's Hill, and the story goes here that the dragon was slain by St. George. The Grims Ditch on the Berkshire Downs is called in a Charter of the tenth century "draegeles baece"—"the dragon's ridge." The tales of these conflicts between men and monsters persist in all ages and in all countries, and one is tempted to wonder whether, after all, the earliest of mankind may not have really encountered and

slain some of the last lingering specimens of creatures such as these. Did they all die a common death at one time from climatic change? Or is it true that the space of time between their period and the advent of man on earth is so vast as to make such encounters impossible?

Be that as it may, it is a reasonable proposition that the remains of this monster were discovered by men of a very early age and their outline carved in the chalk.

The Goring Gap.—It is difficult for those of us who are lacking in a knowledge of geology to understand the changes that have taken place in the surface of the earth in this locality; to realize, for example, that there was no Upper Thames Valley as we know it to-day, that the Goring Gap had no existence, and the Berkshire Downs and Chiltern Hills were one continuous range, formed by the deposit of alternate layers of chalk (the debris of the shells of marine creatures) and flints (fossil sponges) on the bed of the sea.

Fossils of sea-shells are common on the hill-tops, especially sea urchins, locally called "shepherd's crowns." Sir J. H. MacKinder, in his book, *Britain and the British Seas,* tells us that "the strata of chalk were deposited upon the sea bed in continuous sheets, and it follows that they must once have been coherent across the Gap to which the river valley is here narrowed."

It is even more difficult for us to attempt to deal with such problems as the formation of river valleys, or the upliftings and depressions of the earth's crust by which they were begun or ended, processes which, whether measured by time or the material moved, must have been immense beyond description. Something of this kind appears to have happened. According to Sir J. H. MacKinder, what is now the Oxfordshire Vale was once upland ground, as high as the summit of the Chiltern Hills, and the chalk extended much farther west towards the Cotswolds. Ramsay, in his work, *Physical Geology and Geography of Great Britain,* states that a disturbance of

the whole country took place, by which the chalk strata were slowly tilted towards the east, and the water falling on the newly formed slope naturally flowed in an easterly direction; and both these authorities appear to think that from that time the Thames began the slow process of cutting its way through the chalk. But it may have been that when the tilting of the chalk in the south and west took place the water drained at first, not across the Chiltern Hills, but along them in a north-easterly direction to the Wash, and that water flowing in that direction caused the denudation by which the upland gradually became a valley. A subsequent, perhaps temporary, disturbance seems to have occurred. I say temporary because, in the opinion of a capable engineer who knows the levels, to-day a dam of moderate height across the Thames between Goring and Streatley would put the city of Oxford and miles of the surrounding plain under water, which would inevitably once more drain away to the Wash. This second upheaval seems

to have stopped the outflow in this direction and caused a great accumulation of water to the north and west of the Berkshire Downs and Chilterns—in fact a vast lake. The water rose, pressing against the chalk barrier, and, by infiltration or attrition, aided perhaps by some cataclysm, the "strength of the hills" gave way in the angle of the range at Streatley, and so the great Goring Gap was formed, and the water flowing eastwards to join the Kennet and the Loddon became the modern Upper Thames with its tributary streams and brooks.

Mr. Hippsley Cox, in *The Green Roads of England,* inclines to this opinion, for, in dealing with the subject of the Upper Icknield or Ridgeway, he states: "When the Ridgeway was first designed there may possibly have been no river to cross, for the Berkshire Downs were once connected with the Chiltern Hills and the Thames emptied itself into the Wash. The troubles of crossing only began when the river had undermined the cliff and broken through the Goring Gap to find an exit into the Kennet Valley."

For a long period after the lake had drained away, the Vale must have remained an impassable morass; but as the channels of the waterways slowly deepened, the swamp gradually became dry land: and when men found they could cross the Vale in any direction, the old original roads gradually fell into disuse. The only obstacles to traffic were the waterways, and it is not unnatural that some of the earliest settlements should have grown up at the fords by which they were crossed.

The Fords.—It is a remarkable fact that immediately above Goring place names ending with the word "ford" are extraordinarily numerous, and that below Goring all down the Thames to the sea, with a single exception, Harleyford, there is not one! Twyford is, of course, the two fords over the Loddon, and Brentford the ford over the Brent. Immediately above Goring, Moulsford, Wallingford, Shillingford, Sandford, Oxford occur in rapid succession on the main stream, and there are others all over the district. It is not to be

questioned that there were fords across the Thames below Goring—the Romans used one—but the entire absence of place names ending with "ford" below, and the prevalence of such names above Goring, does seem to suggest some explanation such as this.

NOTE ON HARLEYFORD

"Harleyford" may mean simply "the ford at Hurley," the village close by. But it is possible that the name means "Haulyford"—that it was not a true ford, but a ferry where boats were "hauled" across the river.

It was till quite recent times the common practice to use winches to "haul" barges from a lower to an upper reach of the river.

To "harl" is a well-known expression amongst fishermen. It means to haul or drag a lure on a line behind a boat. In the Northumbrian dialect, which was once in use far further south than it is to-day, the verb "to haul" is pronounced "harl," so Harleyford may just possibly mean Haulyford, with the sense of "ferry-ford." This suggestion

will not appeal to anyone who is unfamiliar with the Northumbrian dialect. The late Mr. Heatley Noble used to argue that there was a ford at Henley, but this seems improbable. There was at one time a bridge of boats over the Thames from the site of Bird Place to Friday Street. This was the site of the original Henley Bridge. The present bridge was constructed in or about the year 1786.

The Lower Icknield Way.—Leaving the subject of place names, the course of the Lower Icknield Way seems to point to the same conclusion. Coming from the neighbourhood of the Wash, it enters the county of Oxfordshire near Chinnor. It follows no line of villages, settlements, forts, or folds. It creeps along under the Chilterns just above what must have been the lake shore or edge of the morass until it approaches Goring, where it was deflected in order to meet the Upper Icknield Way for the common purpose of making a crossing of the river.

The road is marked on the Ordnance Map.

It is well preserved, and is there for all to follow on horseback or on foot, not on wheels. That is forbidden—probably quite rightly—by the local landlords.

After crossing the Thames, it follows the inclination of the hills to the west, for we find it below the Berkshire Downs, running to the western seas under the name of the Port Way.

Mr. Thomas, in his book, *The Icknield Way*, amongst other explanations and conjectures, quotes Mr. Harold Peake on "The Prehistoric Roads of Leicestershire" (*Memorials of Old Leicestershire*), who writes of what he calls "the hill-side type of road," which "winds along the sides of hills just above the alluvium. Marshes and low-lying ground are avoided."

This exactly describes the course of the Lower Icknield Way.

The Upper Icknield Way.—But communication between the east coast and the west was made, not by one, but by two main roads running along and under the chalk hills—the Upper and Lower Icknield Ways.

These roads appear to have been complementary to each other and to have been made at the same period—probably the Stone Age—and by the same people. Yet, while Mr. Thomas, in his chapter headed "History Myth and Tradition," seems to have said all that can be said on the subject of the Lower Icknield Way, about the Upper Icknield Way he is strangely reticent—strangely, because he mentions the road more than once.

With all his careful research, he ends in admitting some confusion, for he finds roads bearing the name "Icknield" or variants of it in other parts of England.

It may have been a "system," he tells us. Whatever it may have been elsewhere, it most certainly was a "system" in this locality—a high road and a low road, supplemented by various branch ridgeways and linked together by bridle roads and pack-horse tracks.

On page 120 in his book on St. Berin, the Rev. J. E. Field, who knew the locality well, makes the position perfectly clear:

"Beneath it (Churn Knob), along the edge

of the valley, passes the Roman Portway, and above it, along the front of the hills, passes the broad grass track of the Ridgeway ; these being the two parallel courses of the famous Icknield Street, which the Romans had adopted as their own, passing from Caistor near Norwich, in the Icenian territory, and leading across the entire island."

Coming, like the lower road, from the east coast, somewhere near the Wash, the Upper Icknield Way is shown on the Ordnance Map as entering Oxfordshire on the hills above Chinnor. It is given again on the Ordnance Map, and I believe correctly, as an alternative name to the Ridgeway on the Berkshire Downs.

This great Ridgeway is wonderfully well-preserved, and the claim put forward that it may very likely be " the oldest road in the world " may be justified, for the ancient trade routes of the East were often obliterated or diverted by sandstorms, floods, and earthquakes, just as is happening to-day.

In Oxfordshire the road is not easily traced, but it is impossible to imagine that the ridge

of the Chilterns was roadless, and there are modern roads, old footpaths, and ancient rights of way which show continuously the course it must have taken.

The modern highway follows the line of the Ridgeway along the crest of the Chilterns by Crowell Hill, Beacon Hill, Shirburn Lodge, and the top of the Howe Hill to Park Corner.

Here a branch Ridgeway turns east along the high ground by Priests' Hill to Nettlebed, Bix, and Henley. Our road runs straight on by Huntercombe End. There is slight confusion here. The Ridgeway may have followed the footpath by Hayden or High Down Farm, English Farm, and Uxmore Farm to Checkendon, or it may have gone by Nuffield, Ipsden Heath, and Scots Common, leaving Berins Hill and the Devil's Churchyard to the west, and on to Checkendon. Between Hayden Farm and English Farm it crossed Grims Dyke. English Farm is a curious old place. The name may have reference to the tenure of Borough English ; but the fact that there is a Scots Farm close by makes this

doubtful. It may be that it was a holding of a family called English, for in Ipsden Church there is an inscription: "Here lyeth Master Thomas Englyshe and Isabell his wyffe." The date is 1570. From Checkendon the road runs by Woodcote to Crays Pond. Crays Pond was a very important place on account of the excellence of the water supply. At this point our road turns west, making for Goring, while another road runs due south to Whitchurch, Pangbourne, and Tidmarsh, pointing directly to Silchester. Though it may have been a Stone Age ridgeway, this road seems to be of Roman origin, for there are indications at Theale of a road (North Street) to Pangbourne, and it is only natural to suppose that the Romans would take the earliest opportunity of "linking up" their great settlement at Silchester with the main North Road, i.e. the Upper Icknield Way.

Crays Pond is also important as the point where another road, the Pack and Prime Lane—a pack-horse track coming from Henley—takes the same direction as the Upper

Icknield Way, also making for Goring, and, after crossing the river, for the Berkshire Downs.

Grims Dyke. — The embankment called Grims Dyke runs from Mongewell (monk's well), by Highmore, where it is known as The Trench, to Henley-on-Thames. The word "dyke" is sometimes applied to a bank and sometimes to a ditch. It is equally common in the North of England to say "I fell o'er the dyke" as it is to say "I fell into the dyke." The word, of course, means a bank and ditch, and is derived from the German *dic*, "to dig."

There is another Grims Dyke on the Berkshire Downs, and a third farther north on the Chilterns.

There are similar earthworks elsewhere—at Newmarket, for example. They generally cross open country, and may have been designed not merely as tribal boundaries or for defensive purposes, but to enable travellers to pass to and fro unobserved.

The name Grim is the same as Devil used in similar cases. It is an attempt by people of long, long ago to attribute a supernatural origin to works which were so old, even in their day, that their designers and their use were alike unknown.

The Name "Port." — The recurrence of names of places involving the word "port" in connection with the Icknield Ways is curious.

Charles Elton, in his *Origins of English History*, mentions a chieftain called Port who landed at Portsmouth and "slew a noble young Prince of the Britons"; but Elton is quoting *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and it was common practice in the days when that was written to invent a hero in order to explain a name.

It is interesting to find in Bradshaw a railway station near Birmingham called Icknield Port.

There are roads in other parts of the country called "portways," but here the name seems to be connected with the Goring Gap.

On the Upper Icknield Way in Oxfordshire there is a Portobello. Passing Portobello travelling south-west, at a point where the Upper and Lower Icknield Ways most closely approach each other, we come to a Portways Inn, and farther south the Upper Icknield Way crosses the modern London–Oxford road at a point called Port Hill.

Portobello occurs again on the Berkshire side of the Goring Gap near the Western Ridgeway. Then the Lower Icknield Way, after passing into Berkshire at Goring, turns west, as has already been stated, under the name of the "Portway."

Surely this is not accident? Was the use of the name intended to remind travellers that they were approaching the crossing of the river in the Goring Gap and that they should be ready to avoid the delays and difficulties of overcrowding on the river bank by getting themselves and their flocks and herds into some semi-military formation, and proceed in parties, in turn, with some reasonable distance between them?

Arrangements of this kind would seem to have been necessary. Anyhow, the name "port" has *some* connection with the Gap, for "porta" is Latin for "gate" or "gateway." "Port" is in common use in the Pyrenees for a mountain pass through a gap in the hills —St. Juan au Pied du Port, for example. And right in the middle of the Gap we find a farm bearing the name of *Gate*hampton.

The Rev. Isaac Taylor, in his work *Words and Places*, points out that Roman roads which do not bear the name of Street are often called Portways, of which there are nine in different parts of the kingdom. It is probable that the Romans gave the name "Portway" not only to roads made by themselves, but also to roads already existing.

"Port" and "Gate."—The word "gate" has two meanings. In the South it usually expresses a passage "through," as in the case of a gate in the wall of a city. In the North it expresses a road or way or a passage "along." The root of the word is found in

the German verb "gehen" and the English word "go." "Gut," the intestinal passage, and the nautical term "gat" have the same derivation. A man's gait is the way he goes. "Other gates" means "other ways." To "gang your ain gait" is "to go your own way."

"The passes through lines of hill or cliff are frequently denoted by this root," says Taylor. So we have "port" and "gate" with precisely the same meaning in this connection, and Portway, as the name given by the Romans to the old Lower Icknield Way, because it led to the great passage wrought in the chalk by the river in the Goring Gap.

A different and far simpler explanation of the meaning of the word "port" in connection with roadways is given by Dr. Grundy, who writes with great authority on the subject, quoting freely from the Saxon charters.

In his opinion "port" = "town," and Portway means townway, a road leading to a town. He writes:

"But what is the 'port' indicated by

the name Portweg? All Portways that I have come across—and they have been many—are invariably pointing to the town from which they get their name." If we may read "market" as meaning "town," the Rev. J. E. Field is in agreement with Dr. Grundy. He writes of the "Portway, or Carrying Way"—in fact, the road that led to market.

The "Pack and Prime," a lane leading from Henley to Goring, already mentioned, calls for consideration.

It is hard to realize the difficulties, the delays, and especially the expense, of getting barges up the River Thames even in quite recent times; and it is not surprising that in early days bargemen, on arriving at Henley, in order to avoid the long up-stream journey round the great bend of the river by Reading, transferred their goods to pack-horses and sent them over the Chiltern Hills by road direct to Goring and the west.

The use of pack-horses was very common in the district. The names of inns, such as

The Four Horse Shoes, The Pack Horse, The Pack Saddle, are evidence of it; and indeed the trackways themselves can frequently be seen, especially on hill-sides, where the horses' hoofs have scored deep V-shaped depressions in the chalk—so deep and so narrow that they are almost invariably duplicated. One instance will suffice. The modern Henley–Oxford road, at the foot of Gangsdown Hill, crosses one of these pack-horse trails, leading from the Lower to the Upper Icknield Way. The tracks can be plainly seen, mounting up to the golf links at Huntercombe, where "greens" have actually been laid out on a road thousands of years old!

For some years the name "Pack and Prime," contracted into "Prackham," puzzled me. There can be little doubt that it arose from the fact that, when resting themselves and baiting their horses, the packmen indulged in a little local trading, and that when the time came to move on the head-man gave the word "Pack and prime," i.e. "Pack your packs and prime your pistols."

In fact, it was a semi-military word of command, like "Boot and saddle," and it was contracted into "Prackham," just as the word of command "Attention" has been contracted into "Shon."

It seems to be another case of a very old road with a comparatively modern name, for it is obvious that the name could not have been in use before the invention of firearms.

The Pack and Prime leaves Henley by the hollow below Rotherfield Court, climbs the hill to Hernes, and, joining what is called Dog Lane, runs by Peppard, passing between the club house of Peppard Golf Club and the mound which marks the spot where Peppard Games were held—bull-baiting, quarter-staff, and so on—even to recent times. From there it runs to Wyfold Grange, the site of the original Court House of the Manor of Wyfold. One half of the house, being in Peppard parish, is in the Barony of Stonor; the other half, being in Checkendon parish, is in the royal Manor of Benson, once the property of Edward the Black Prince, held by him in right of his

wife, Johanna, to whom as Lady of Benson payments were made at Wyfold Court, now Wyfold Grange.

In 1341 rent due from John de Molyns for the Manor of Benson was remitted by the Lady Johanna for the "service of a rose," which the holder of Wyfold is still bound to offer should the Queen pass by. The house is built in a prehistoric fort, and contains a pond and well, 400 feet deep.

It is famous for an elm-tree of extraordinary size. When grubbing up three very old cherry-trees in Wyfold Grange meadow recently two silver coins of Elizabeth were found under the roots of the centre tree. They had apparently been placed there for luck. The coins are just the size of a shilling, but very thin. The Queen's head, the inscription, and the date (1566) are quite clear.

In a wood called "Castle Grove," about a quarter of a mile west of Wyfold Grange, is another prehistoric fort, also containing a pond. It is octagonal in shape and, except on the north side, well preserved.

It is probable that the name Wyfold is really Twyfold, from these two forts or folds. Compare Twyford, the two fords over the Loddon.

Just north of this fort runs the Pack and Prime Lane over what is called "**Kipping Hill.**"

This is an interesting spot, equidistant from Goring to the west, Reading to the south, and Henley to the east. From the name it was doubtless a market, "Kipping" being "Chipping," from "cheapen," "to bargain." Compare Chipping Hill (Sussex), Cheapside, Chipping Norton, and many similar names.

There is a pond on Kipping Hill; and a line of ponds shows the course of the Pack and Prime by Deadmans Lane until it approaches the Upper Icknield Way at Crays Pond, and so to Goring.

The disappearance of the northern rampart of the fort in Castle Grove was probably caused by cattle and pack-horses being driven over it to water at the pond within the walls as the fort gradually fell into disuse, for the

supply is far better than that afforded by the pond on Kipping Hill. It should be noted that there was a well-known family called Kipping or Kyppyng.

The name occurs in an inscription on a tomb in St. Mary's Church, Stratfield Mortimer, and a member of the family is mentioned in Domesday Book as holding two manors at Stratfield in the reign of Edward the Confessor (*History of Berkshire*).

There appears to be another road bearing the name of " Pack and Prime," which runs from the river below Henley up by Fawley Deer Park to Henley Park. It passes " The Mount," a prehistoric fortress commanding the junction of the Thames Valley and the Valley of the " Fair Mile," and drops down to Assenden, where it joins the branch Ridgeway—now the modern road—from Henley to Nettlebed.

It passes close by " Soundes," better known as " Nell Gwynne's Bower," and is said to have been used by Charles II on his visits to that lady.

The Henley Fair Mile.—This avenue, running from Henley towards Assenden, is one of the noblest in England. A trusty correspondent writes of it as follows: "The Stapletons of Grays Court have been Lords of the royal Manor of Bensington at any rate from the year 1726. After being in the hands of the Quartremayne family for some years, it was then for a time the property of the City of London. Sir Thomas Stapleton planted the avenue of trees in or about the year 1752, and the grazing of the Fair Mile has always been let with other land belonging to the Stapletons in the parish of Bix and Henley.

"The Manor of Bensington actually extended from the Sheep Wash at the corner of Phyllis Court wall (where the house known as 'Manor Gardens' is now built) to the River Thame at Dorchester. All the small pieces of waste land were let off on lifeholds and there were at one time two or three hundred of such tenancies. There is also, or rather were, a considerable number of pure copyhold tenancies in the parishes of Benson

proper and Warborough, the largest of them being held by St. John's College, Oxford, but these have nearly all been enfranchised. The old road, not nearly so straight, ran along the west side of the present avenue."

Bridle Roads.—There is another class of road which calls for brief remark—the bridle roads.

These roads were probably reserved for the use of horsemen and foot passengers. Pack-horses and cattle were not allowed on them, for they are usually just wide enough for two mounted men to pass, not as we do to-day, keeping to the left, but probably "bridle hand to bridle hand," to lessen the danger of a sword thrust or stab in the back. Hence, perhaps, the name. In cavalry drill, officers passing from one flank to another pass "bridle hand to bridle hand."

A good example of a bridle road runs along the north bank of the Thames from Caversham to Goring, and on by Mongewell to Wallingford.

THE CROSSING OF THE THAMES AT GORING

We have now got four roads, the Upper and Lower Icknield Ways, the "Pack and Prime," and a bridle road, all meeting at Goring for the common purpose of crossing the river. How did they cross? Constant references are made by various writers to "the ford" between Goring and Streatley. There seems to be no evidence of any such ford. A narrow gorge, with presumably a deep and rapid stream, would be an unsuitable, even an impossible place for a ford. The crossing was more probably effected by rafts and coracles. If there had been a ford there, it would have been the oldest, as well as the most important, of all the fords, and surely the general custom of giving the settlement beside it a name ending with "ford" would have been followed.

But the place was called Goring. Now this name may simply mean the "ing" or meadow at the Gore or Gap; but the most probable

explanation of the meaning of the name is to be found in Alexander's *Oxfordshire Place Names*.

An early form was "Goringes" (A.D. 1086), and Alexander tells us that this name "contains the old English 'gar, gara,' a word used in charters to denote 'a promontory or tongue of land, probably wedge-shaped.'"

"Garinges" might then mean "dwellers at the gara." The French word "garage" means "a mooring place," and the simpler form "gare," "a wet-dock or landing-place." This is very significant, and justifies the conclusion that the crossing was not by ford but by ferry, and that Goring means "the settlement by the landing-stage."

Close by is Cleeve, which simply means "cliff" or "cleft." Compare "cleaver" or "chopper." Also compare Clifton, the "ton" or town on the great gorge of the River Avon below Bristol.

There is no name indicating the presence of a ford. Yet the story of a ford between Goring and Streatley still exists, and it may

be there was first a ferry and afterwards a ford.

The Berkshire Downs.—It is difficult to realize that the open upland of the Berkshire Downs, which we regard as an out-of-the-way country, given up to sheep and the training of race-horses, was from the earliest times down to a quite recent period quick and alive with human activity.

The ground is studded with the graves of Celtic and Saxon peoples.

Along its great thoroughfare, the Ridgeway, came strange traders with strange goods, prospectors for metals, adventurers of all kinds, bringing new ideas, culture, civilization as they passed westward from the east and south.

The Roman legions marched along it, occupying its Stone Age forts.

The desolating Danes, who for two hundred years raided or ruled the land, used it for their bloody forays. On these Downs the great Alfred first took their measure.

Under the Normans in the Middle Ages the same conditions prevailed.

At Aldworth, for example, the noble family of de la Beche, one of whom, Nicholas, was tutor to the Black Prince, had their castle; and the small church is full of fine monuments to their Crusader forbears. The name Aldworth, or Old Homestead, is testimony of its extreme antiquity.

At Compton, close by (Combe Town, or the Town in the Valley), Roman coins and pottery have been found in most unusual quantities; and there is ample evidence of its having been an extensive settlement in the days of the Britons. At East Ilsley (Hildas Lea), the probable site of Alfred's victory, up till a few years ago were regularly held the greatest sheep fairs in England.

Indeed, the district round Aldworth, Compton, and Ilsley, equally distant from the eastern and western seas, where many Ridgeways and other roads meet, must have been from time immemorial a great centre of traffic and intercourse, and is of extreme interest to

the antiquary. See Hewett's *History of the Hundred of Compton.*

Berkshire Ridgeways. — It is difficult to follow the exact courses of the Ridgeways and other roads on the Berkshire Downs above Streatley, but the broad position seems clear.

There are road meetings at Kingstanding Hill, East Ilsley, Roden Down, Compton, and Aldworth. About half a mile east of Aldworth at four cross roads, an inn called The Four Points seems reminiscent of the past.

One of these roads comes up from the Thames at Pangbourne, where there appears to have been a crossing of the river. Two Ridgeways, one coming from the south-east and the other from the north-east, bear the name of *West* Ridgeway, though they are eastward of the main Ridgeway.

They got the name, in all probability, because their objective was the main west-going Ridgeway—"The Great Western" of the Stone Age. The trend of traffic was

ever westward, pressure coming from the east.

The road called the West Ridgeway coming from the south-east probably began at the coast about Southampton Water, and came by Winchester, Stonehenge, and Speen or Hungerford, through Hampstead Norris and Compton, to Roden Down. The other *West* Ridgeway coming from the north-east, after crossing the Thames at Goring, runs up Streatley Hill straight for Compton ; but just before reaching Aldworth it throws off, at Westridge Green, a branch road, which runs round the top of the combe on the south side of Unhill Wood, to join the Ridgeway coming from the south-east at Roden Down. Here both these roads linked up with the Great Ridgeway, which, after passing along the summit of the Chilterns and crossing the Thames at Goring, follows the line of the modern road to the west, and at Kingstanding Hill turns up on to the Downs, where it opens out into a splendid wide stretch of green turf called the Fair Mile. It is part of, but

much broader than, the Ridgeway proper, which has a width of forty feet only. It compares with the Rowley Mile at Newmarket, as it well may, for it was laid out as a race-course by James I, and Kingstanding Hill was the royal grand stand, from which that monarch and his courtiers saw the sport, and not only, as is popularly believed, the place where Alfred watched the retreat of the defeated Danes on Reading.

If James I and other Stuart monarchs raced and hunted on the Berkshire Downs, there must have been a royal residence or hunting lodge in the neighbourhood. The following extract from *The Berks, Bucks, and Oxon Archæological Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 176, throws some light on the matter :

" In the Board Room at Paddington Station is a screen containing the ancient leaded glass from a two-light window at Foxhall Farm, Didcot, which was demolished in 1884, when the Railway Company constructed the western curve there. The arms in stained

glass on each small diamond-shaped pane are the Rose of England and the Thistle of Scotland, and said to be of the period of James II.

"Foxhall is traditionally said to have been a royal hunting box of that monarch. Seventy years ago the house is described as the principal residence in the village, but was there known as Vauxhall.

"W. H. HALLAM."

Indeed, the very name Fox Hall is suggestive of a hunting lodge.

At Kingstanding Hill a trackway coming from Moulsford indicates a passage of the river at this point by a road which makes a short cut from Woodcote on the Chiltern Ridgeway to the Ridgeway on Kingstanding Hill. About one mile west of Streatley a third road runs up from the Thames Valley, by way of the combe to the south of Unhill Wood, called on the Ordnance Map the Icknield Way. This is a branch from the Lower Icknield or Portway, which followed its usual course along the edge of the swampy ground. This branch road also goes to Roden Down,

where it turns west and runs parallel with and a little to the south of the Main Ridgeway. This is probably the route taken by the Pack and Prime after crossing into Berkshire. The pack-horse tracks are plainly to be seen, and it is to-day spoken of as " the drove road by which cattle came from Bristol to London."

The whole position is dominated by the camp on Lowbury Hill.

Two roads have been referred to as bearing the name *West* Ridgeway, whose objective was to link up with the great west-going Ridgeway at Roden Down. That is true; but it is in a sense rather misleading, for it is also true that the *West* Ridgeway forms one continuous line of road from Streatley by Westridge Green, Hungerford Green, and Aldworth to Hampstead Norris. To the south of Hampstead Norris, near Hermitage, it passes Little Hungerford. The recurrence of the name Hungerford seems to suggest that it passed through Hungerford itself on its way to the southern sea.

It is reasonable to suppose that the Ridge-

ways, like the bridle roads, were reserved for horse and foot passengers, and that cattle were usually allowed on the lower roads only, or, when passing over the high ground, as of course they often did, on tracks running alongside the main thoroughfares.

The difficulty of water supply alone would make such an arrangement necessary. In the waterless uplands ponds would suffice for the horses and a certain amount of cattle. Travellers themselves could carry their water supply with them.

This, in the Middle Ages, they did in earthenware jars called " crostels," slung over their shoulders.

The lower roads—and the upper Ridgeways generally had complementary lower ways—varying enormously in width according to the weather and the amount of traffic, must have been almost impassable for horse and foot passengers at certain seasons.

Hippsley Cox attributes the fine, smooth daisy-growing surface of the Great Ridgeway to the traffic of pack-ponies and cattle. Had

they been permitted to cut it up, we should not find it to-day in the condition in which it has been preserved.

This and similar Ridgeways were probably originally as jealously guarded against cattle and pack-horses as the trainers' gallops in the locality are to-day, until the time came when they fell into disuse and nobody cared.

Dr. Grundy classifies these lower roads as "summer ways," and suggests that they were used in summer time when the going was good, to save travellers the trouble of climbing to the hill-top roads.

But if the hill country was as thickly populated as one imagines and the valleys were practically impassable, there would be ample need for both roads all the year round, the upper roads for passenger traffic and the lower roads for cattle.

Such an arrangement would explain the meaning of the old Scotch song :

> Then you'll take the high road,
> And I'll take the low road,
> And I'll be in Scotland before ye.

You'll take the high road, with all its advantages, and I'll take the low road, with all its difficulties, yet I'll be in Scotland before you.

The Name "Icknield."—Mr. Thomas has told us all that is known as to the meaning of the name "Icknield."

He quotes Camden: "What the origin of the name should be, as God shall help me, I dare not guess." Most of the suggested derivations which he examines with such care seem simply silly. And so he apparently thinks, for he ends by saying as to its signification: "And still nobody knows or believes that anybody else knows."

After this confession of impotence on the part of Camden and Thomas, it requires some courage to venture to make any fresh suggestion as to the meaning of this mysterious name.

It is unlikely that the names of places were given by the people who made them. There was no need. It was not until the

settlements became numerous enough to cause confusion that names were required to distinguish them. This is equally true in the case of roads. For long "the road" would simply be "the road"; at most "the high road" and "the low road," as in the song just mentioned.

Who, then, gave these roads their names?

I again quote Mr. Thomas:

"Invaders or newly organized people have to take what roads they find."

What "invaders" had he in mind? Were they, by chance, those friendly invaders the Phœnicians or Carthaginians, who came to these islands in search of tin—"the white metal"? Was it Pytheas, the Greek mathematician, and his comrades, who were sent from Marseilles to the West on a voyage of discovery, and who, in the course of their travels, reached this country? That expedition is a matter of history, and in this connection of comparatively modern history. One of the great causes of human migration on a large scale, and of the development of other-

wise unexplored territories, has always been the search for metals. What has happened in our times in Australia, South Africa, and Nigeria has been going on since the beginning of history. The older writers are full of references to the search for gold, silver, lead, copper, and tin. Thousands of years ago adventurers came to Ireland prospecting for gold, which was then plentiful in the Wicklow Mountains (Peake). The Mediterranean peoples had heard of the easy winning of alluvial tin in Spain and England, and sent expeditions to find it.

Now Greek was the lingua franca of the Mediterranean seaboard—indeed, it was more than that, it was a language universally spoken all over the then known world.

To that fact, and the road-making of the Romans throughout their Empire, the rapidity with which the Christian religion spread was largely due.

These adventurers probably spoke it.

Pytheas certainly did.

It is not to be imagined that these " voya-

geurs," who had come so far, would return without exploring the land they had reached after such a journey. They may have found the minerals much worse and the climate much better than they had been led to expect. They could only use such roads—almost certainly nameless—as they found.

They would naturally "ask their way."

Now the Greek for "trackway" is ἴχνος, and the nominative plural is ἴχνη, which, written in English characters, is "ichnee"; and in making their inquiries as to where the "roads" were leading them, "ichnee" would be the word they used.

The word "eld" is a root word meaning "old." The local inhabitants—at least as ignorant of direction and distance as country people are to-day—in their replies constantly, in all probability, used this word "eld," for even in their days the roads were old.

So, by question and answer, we get the word "Ichnee-eld" or "Icknield," meaning "trackways of old" or "trackways of the men of old." This derivation may seem far-

fetched, but it is not the only instance of the use of Greek for a "place name" in this locality. Whether one travels by river, road, or rail, "Wittenham Clumps" are always with us. The place is also known as "Sinodun Hills." Both names have the same meaning. "Wittan" was the Saxon name for an assembly or parliament; "synod" is a Greek word also meaning "assembly." Sinodun, then, may mean Assembly Hill or Parliament Hill, the termination "dun" or "don" being the same as the "don" termination in "Snowdon."

It may be that the word is derived from the Greek σύν = "together with," and ὅδος = "a road," with the sense of the road meeting; hence a place of assembly. Skeat, in *Berkshire Place Names*, writes: "There is no particular reason why it may not simply mean Synod Down. Hills were often used for meetings, and it is a curious fact that the word 'synod,' though of Greek origin, was a fairly common word in Anglo-Saxon times."

As to the Greek derivation of these two

words, Icknield and Sinodun, let me conclude by boldly saying :

> Si quid novisti rectius istis candidus imperti,
> Si non, his utere mecum.—HORACE.

SOME OLD ROADS

The Papist Way.—This is yet another instance of a very old road with a comparatively modern name. It is shown on the Ordnance Map as beginning at the site of an ancient monastery near Cholsey (Ceols-ey, or Gravel Island. Compare the Chesil Beach and Chelsea), and, after crossing the Thames at Littlestoke, as running up the Chilterns to Berins Hill. This road up Berins Hill is of extreme antiquity. Alongside the modern road are two parallel tracks hollowed out many feet into the chalk. One is said to have been used for ascending, the other for descending the hill.

The road goes east by Stoke Row, where the Romans established potteries and introduced cherry orchards (Read of Ipsden), which are now extensively cultivated in the district.

The village is interesting on account of its oriental well, presented to the people by a Maharajah of Benares, in recognition of services rendered to him by a member of the Read family.

The road, far older than the times of St. Berin, may have been used as a connecting link between the mound erected on Churn Hill to his memory and the cell which local tradition holds the saint established on Berins Hill, by processions of religious people visiting these holy places. On the other hand, it may be that, after crossing the Thames, it followed the Lower Icknield Way, and was used by pilgrims travelling from the South to Bury St. Edmunds.

Exlade Street.—The name of this hamlet, south-east of and bordering on Woodcote Park, seems to indicate a Roman road between Checkendon and Reading.

The Roman road from Alchester, near Bicester, crosses Otmoor on its way to Dor-

chester, where it abruptly ends, though it doubtless originally went on to Silchester.

The Angle Way, in Buckinghamshire, is rather outside the district we are considering. It is an old trackway from Shabbington to Akeman Street, which it joins near Fleet Marston.

The meaning of the name and the history of the road are obscure.

THE CHILTERNS

Poaching.—There is no more persistent cause of political and social trouble than the inherited sense of grievance or injustice on the part of certain classes of people with regard to the ownership of land and the rights of property.

It has been one of the root causes of disorder in Ireland, for example.

There is evidence of a longing for the land amongst the peasants of the Chiltern Hills. It becomes manifest at election times. They seem to feel that they have been deprived

of the land, at some time, somehow, by somebody. It is specially so in the case of the sporting rights over the commons and wastes, which are numerous and extensive in the district. The sentiment is understandable. It is historically true. It is in their blood, for many of them are descended from those ancient Britons who, after a long and bloody resistance in defence of their native soil and homes, were finally defeated by the Angles and Saxons. It is probable that the last stand of the Britons in the Midlands was made at the Battle of Benson in 571, when the victory of Cuthwolf, grandson of Cerdic, made him master of the Vale of Aylesbury and the towns of Benson and Eynsham on the Upper Thames (the Rev. C. J. Abbey, *On the Chilterns*).

Modern historians seem to agree that this great Anglo-Saxon advance took place at this time, and no doubt there must have been fighting at an important place like Benson; but Charles Elton, in his *Origins of English History*, gives Bedford, and not Benson, as

the place where the decisive battle took place.

So does Sir Charles Oman, in *England before the Conquest,* but the latter writer refuses to accept the possibility of strong British settlements at this date at places so near London as Bedford, Aylesbury, Benson, and Eynsham. But if Cuthwolf was not fighting the Britons, with whom was he fighting? One can only conclude that he was engaged with Teutonic neighbours who had proved unfriendly and that he was endeavouring to consolidate his territory (see Oman's *England before the Conquest,* pp. 230, 231).

Be that as it may, it can hardly be doubted that amongst the Chilternsæters there was, and is, a strong infusion of British blood, and that while the bulk of the Britons had been driven westwards, large numbers—not merely individuals, but whole families and fragments of tribes—found refuge in the wild woodlands of the Chiltern Hills, and there maintained the traditions of their former greatness and their lost lands.

The remains of their last strongholds may be found in the quaintly named "cuckoo pens," which are peculiar to the locality, a subject fully dealt with by the Rev. J. E. Field in his book, *The Myth of the Pent Cuckoo.* The Angles and Saxons took their lands wholesale. The Norman Conquest made the position worse, alike for the remnants of the British race and their Anglo-Saxon conquerors. Under Norman rule England was regarded as the property of Duke William, and by him was parcelled out to his nobles by counties, baronies, and manors. "No land without a lord" was the Norman maxim (Peake). The lords, from being guardians of the commons, gradually became owners of all but the right of grazing—notably of the sporting rights.

Where no lord was appointed, the land remained in the King's hands, and vast tracts of country were declared royal forests. Many of the Saxon and pre-Saxon roads passing through these forests fell into disuse, for the forest laws were severe, and even *bona fide* travellers hesitated to run the risk of losing

a hand or ear in proving they were not poachers.

Until Norman times, hunting in this country was, speaking generally, carried on for the purpose of killing dangerous animals or procuring food. The Normans hunted, not for food, but for fun. With them it was sport for sport's sake. If a sportsman may be defined as one who desires to see fair play between man and man, and fair play between man and beast, and if we deserve our reputation as being a nation of sportsmen, we owe it largely to our Norman ancestors.

To-day more or less organized attempts at poaching these commons occur from time to time. They are made apparently not so much to capture the game or rabbits, but rather as a protest against the loss of a supposed right, or by way of asserting a right which no longer exists.

Many of the people seem honestly to believe that they have the right, and they are encouraged in this mistake by some who ought to know, and some who do know, better,

for the shooting rights of the lords of these manors have been confirmed again and again by courts of law. In many cases they have been sold and let to shooting tenants, who can hardly be considered unreasonable if they expect peaceable enjoyment of the privilege for which they have paid.

But the old inherited feeling of injustice lingers on, and is used by agitators to make bad blood between those who are otherwise friendly neighbours.

As an old labourer once remarked to the writer, "Ah, sir, them's the kind of men as prevents gentlemen from being gentlemen."

The subject of these commons is fully dealt with by Mr. Harold Peake in his interesting new book, *The English Village*.

The Judges Road.—There is no doubt the Chiltern Hills were until quite recent times a wild and lawless region. A journey from London to Oxford involved risk of life or limb. The highwaymen who robbed travellers on the Bath Road at Maidenhead Thicket

sought refuge in the dense woodlands of the hills.

The office of Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds was not the sinecure that it is to-day.

The Rev. C. I. Abbey, a former Rector of Checkendon, a village situated in the centre of the southern end of the range, once the property of the Marmyon family, writes of the importance of the office: "Not only for its authority in regard to forest laws, but for the maintenance of the peace in a district so much frequented by lawless persons. The itinerant Judges, or Judges in Eyre, made their periodical visitation throughout the forest, and held their Courts sometimes at Checkendon for the Langtree Hundred, and alternately at Ewelm and at Wyfold for the royal Manor of Benson."

A fragment of a wide woodland road in the parish still bears the name of "The Judges Road"; and a neighbouring squire, now living, recalls the fact that his grandfather, when high sheriff, provided the judges

with an escort armed with blunderbusses for their protection.

The Norman System.—Whatever may have been the defects of the Norman system of law and its administration, that it proved strong and enduring is shown by this further quotation from Mr. Abbey's pamphlet, *On the Chilterns*: "The life of the Princely Honour of Wallingford may be almost said to have breathed out its expiring throbs at Checkendon in 1847. The Castle and Honour of Wallingford had been annexed in 1540 to the Manor and Honour of Ewelm. In 1821, John, fourth Earl of Macclesfield, purchased this Honour and Manor of the Crown with the quit rents belonging to it in several counties. The very last Court Leet, as I am told, and view of Frank pledge for the Honour, was held at Checkendon for about twenty-four parishes and tithings at Easter, 1847. All the places but one were represented. 'Essoign' money was paid, Checkendon paying 5s. 4d. Constables and tithingmen were appointed.

Americiaments were 'affeared' by sworn 'affearers.'

"To all who performed 'suit and service,' were granted, at request, on parchment, under seal of the Honour, exemption from tolls, stallage, pickage, and murage at all fairs and markets throughout England and Wales."

These grants were in many cases tested at law and confirmed. And this in 1847—only seventy-six years ago!

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